

Lies From the Space Gods

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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by  
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**Mini artist statement**

I strive to write slightly odd, lyrical poems that examine loneliness and queer perspectives. I draw from the tone of Marty McConnell the most and also enjoy Ada Limón, Anne Carson, and T.S. Eliot. I try and push experimental details and thought patterns even within more traditional narrative pieces.

## Lies from the Space Gods

Mother used to tell me that all good things came from spaceships.  
Laid out on her splintered Adirondack chair,  
Black and Mild dangling between teeth, I wondered  
if she was waiting for her fleet to return  
from a hazy, purple place. Celestial dust  
peppered her skin. Her eyes bore  
through my body. Did other children

of ethereal mothers collect black holes in their stomachs?  
Did children come from spaceships too?  
Lavender and ash, my mother, a bore,  
rolled out of her Adirondack, raised  
a mild hand to my belly and whispered *you are a bucket of stars*.  
Celestial dust on my skin, I shone. For Mother, to be fleet

and as strong as gossamer,  
was fleeting. At recess I told the older children that if they spun me fast  
on the carousel, I would throw up  
celestial cereal-marshmallow stars and rice Chex spaceships.  
As they whirled me round and round. I pretended to be bored,

told my gut to be as strong as gossamer. In rebellion, a bore  
of water and bile fled  
my body. A puddle of Milky Way  
and laughter at my feet. A mild  
case of the spins kept me  
near a bucket all day. The children  
whispered *weak* and *full of shit*.  
Only space is full of stars

and celestial bodies. I hadn't had breakfast that morning.  
Just sucked celestial dust off my fingers. Bore hunger  
on my hipbones and dreamed of spaceships, full  
of tea and dark meat chicken. And of a fleet  
coming to take me from Mother and the older children.  
They would zap me up in a haze.

I walked home that evening under a lavender sky. Screams of children and dogs  
bore through the streets as I slumped into Mother's Adirondack and waited  
for the fleet of spaceships. I smoked a Black and Mild. I was bored, wanted  
to fill my lungs with ash. No celestial dust or bucket of stars or fleet  
of delicate children could make me believe that good ever came from spaceships.

## **Diet Versus**

In the grocery, waiting for sliced ham,  
my mother would tell me about the chemicals

in ready-made pizza  
crust, and how we bought  
the expensive kind because  
I would eat it  
and kids need to  
eat, but one day it was going to kill me.

Just kidding. My mother rarely talks.

She's trapped somewhere between Texas  
and divorce, standing on two bum knees

and, occasionally, my body. My mother taught me  
about silence. How to use  
it and how to break it so it hurts.

Her knees  
are screaming, but she has stopped  
buying me pizza crust in an effort to be better.

## Arms

Yesterday in group  
June said she liked to make models  
of all her lovers' left arms.  
Duct tape an empty Pringles can  
to a paper towel roll  
to a rubber glove  
then carve their names  
into the cardboard  
using a bobby pin.  
June said it was her life's work.  
Her eyes rolled like blueberries.  
June said her mother pushed  
a steak knife  
through her bicep  
when she forgot to grab  
the whiskey on the way  
home from school. Her mother  
let the wound fester.  
Now June's always got an itch.  
*Do you ever try to put them on?*  
The fruit fell from her eyes.  
June said none of them ever seem to fit.

**You're not wrong. My mother hates you.**

On the fifth of July you gave me a jar of pickles.  
Your dad made us pancakes for breakfast, said they would have  
tasted better with a honey drizzle. I built a beehive  
in my backyard when I got home. My mother wasn't pleased.

The bees arrived and I gave her the empty pickle jar.  
*For the wax. Make yourself a candle. Unscented.* She put it in a cupboard.  
*You're going to get hurt.* Slick in summer heat, slide, click, a comb, a kiss.  
The bees asleep in an apple haze. You told me you bought a ticket to  
Connecticut when you thought I wasn't listening.

The bees woke up. I wasn't wearing gloves. They swarm to skin.  
When a bee stings, it leaves two things behind: a body and a scar.  
Once when I was six my mother was stung while we were eating  
lunch in the ruins of a castle. She couldn't walk for days.

My mother filled her jar with formaldehyde  
and dead bees. They each have a name like Disappointment.  
She keeps them in the bathroom next to the baking soda and gauze.

## **Sweet Dreams**

I want to bake a pie. Dad says he'll help. He went looking  
for a pan and some sugar. I need to get the berries  
but it's snowing. I'm not wearing shoes. My hand is lost  
in a bush, basket dangling from my elbow. The branches  
have been picked clean. There is a piecrust in my basket.  
Birds are bickering on a wire. My mother bangs pans  
to shoo them away. I hear a song of feathers and brass.  
I can't find any berries. I shuffle over a dirt brown carpet,  
through a thicket. In the clearing my mother stands hunched,  
blue juice dripping from her fingers. A bird smeared at her feet.  
*June, honey, go back to bed.*

## Waiting for Money from the Hands of Dolls

My closet floor is riddled with the bodies  
of dolls. They carry birthdays in their palms,  
leave porcelain ears in my shoes as gifts.

My grandmother and I used to spend nights  
dancing on gravel, spinning until blood  
covered our feet like sunrise.

*You have got to listen to the body.  
Let it scream. Let it smoke  
cigarettes. Let it give back*

*to the earth with ecstasy and bruises.*  
Then she would leave, throw  
pillows reupholstered with nicotine,

an orange box on the counter covered  
in Sharpie saying she hadn't forgotten my birthday.  
Here was another doll for my collection.

One year she stopped coming.  
The dolls began to wear. I put  
them in the closet. Now

my grandmother lives in a blueprint  
of a house. The walls are to be made of bone  
and old money. I want to visit and leave

her an orange box of dust that says, *listen  
to the body. It is time to settle down.*



## **Fringe**

Border Collies keep watch  
over the salon. Men and women in  
orange velvet robes smoke  
hashish from dark mahogany pipes.  
Through the ash they discuss the parties  
of summer and the post war boom as if they were equal  
gifts from God. With blood shot eyes and  
dizzying limbs, the host tries to lead the group  
in prayer. He calls for the blessing  
of poppies and mustard, condoms,  
automobiles and all things  
that rest on their side. *Crab legs do not  
belong in the mouths of sinners.*  
In the corner, a woman,  
arms raised, begs for more  
passionate tongues.  
The host gets sick over the floor.  
Under the eyes of the dogs, he is the first  
to lay face down  
in vomit that smells like soured crab.  
Not fortunate enough to pass out on his side.

## **Happy Birthday Katherine**

where it says tessellate read  
freak death from falling down stairs  
where it says Chapstick read  
my intestines have been leaking  
sadness into my belly for years  
where it says peaches read  
any three lines from “The Love  
Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock”  
where it says shit read shit  
blue like the ocean you see  
when you read loneliness  
crawl through fences and get  
stick ‘n’ poke stories written on your body  
drawn between the lines  
are stick-figure bodies  
but still you can only see  
the traces of ghosts and  
hear the screams of the girl  
across the hall  
as she gets fucked  
sideways.

## Midwestern Goats

People say the Midwest is all corn  
and unfavorable averages. People say  
corn tastes like military bases  
and snow. People say the Midwest  
is just fly over states. People say you could fly  
military planes using corn oil.  
Corn oil can power lawn mowers, weed  
whackers, and the spare electric generator.  
People say keep a generator  
for when the hurricane  
hits in September. Pigs will take to the sky  
tearing down power lines. Grade school  
kids bathe in their grandmother's  
pools and pee in the yards  
so they don't have to flush.  
People say spare the mow and get a goat.  
Get lots of goats. You can order them  
on Amazon. It's not your responsibility  
to keep the goats warm. Put them on  
a plane to the Amazon or Syria.  
People say in ancient times  
Syrians took goats to the king's wedding  
and put silver around their necks.  
Sent the goats out of town to drag  
bad luck away. People say  
it did not work, the same way goats  
serve as very bad lawn mowers.  
In the Midwest, people believe  
in the lawn, in the average salary,  
and corn. You take care of the yard  
by giving it a flat top and a flying pig  
statue. You pray to Butter Jesus while riding  
around town on a sled pulled by goats.

## **A History of Rubber Ducks**

January is always an ice age.  
A small cut and slow drag  
melting to the songs of birds.  
A river swallows the bathtub.

Glaciers drop granulated hope  
into peat mineral soil. A girl crawls  
out of dirty water froth in March  
onto a beach of tile and moss.

She plants a garden, which blooms  
an asparagus city from copper and vitamin K.  
She settled near the river  
on the spines of horticulture books.

Each spring, through the chill,  
the girl waits to worship the ducks  
as they float by on the ice green water,  
buoys of nostalgia.

### **Phantom Pains**

Once in the forest we found the body  
of a deer leaking red from a hole  
in its liver. You said even with the  
shotgun's shock, she would have gone  
quietly. The way you blanketed  
her in leaves still makes my belly ache.  
You were only carbonating  
soil. Rich lines grew from your throat  
and dropped at your feet like chestnuts.  
I watered them and watered them but they  
did not grow. Spoiled. You said you wanted  
to raise trees together. But dear,  
you went quietly. I wish I had sawed off  
the doe's soft antlers, ground them into  
powder, and caught your ghost in the dust.

## **Wine Is Not As Delicate As You Would Think**

I.

a corkscrew stuck  
down my throat.  
ribbons of flesh  
etched out of my insides,  
fresh tilled land for  
funest seeds that  
trick me into thinking  
they will heal my wounds

II.

my body is a greenhouse  
absorbing sun through  
the pores in my skin.  
wading through puddles  
of gastric acid humidity,  
red blood cells with  
green thumbs arrive  
in my belly to garden.

III.

veins become vines pumping  
chlorophylloid envy into  
my fingers and toes. i prick  
myself with my thorns.  
i bleed not blood but  
a sticky green sap  
that attracts bees.

IV.

glass splits sprouting  
baby green twigs.  
my crop is not ready for  
harvest so i sew raw shoots  
into my dry, cracking skin.

V.

no one has come to pick my fruit.  
i am full of overripe grapes.  
they rupture and ferment  
turning my organs into wine.  
i am a vintner, an internal vine  
and ribcage cask. i crack myself  
open and bleed.

VI.

the bees swarm  
in a yellow haze,  
picking up leftover seeds.  
make sure to keep your mouth  
shut when they pollinate.

## Hive 59

Every two months my landlord  
tells me the fleshy patches on my walls  
are not mold. Rock expands, bellies  
rolling out filled with summer rain.  
Keep the dehumidifier on. A hum  
like my grandpa's sleep apnea machine  
sucks the other sounds away. The washed  
out dishwasher spin cycle. The Sunday  
night stranger drunk on the couch.  
The shower sex. The two holes  
in the particle board across the hall.  
Someone told me to keep bees  
in there once. Keep the dehumidifier  
on. Yawning kitchen tile. Maintenance  
men. The dehumidifier beeps three times.  
There is mold under my bed. Liquid  
condensed noise will echo in the tub  
when I pour it down the drain.  
There are bees in my walls. We do  
not have a tub. I do not have allergies.  
I do have mold. Buzz. Buzz. Black.  
Julia Nunes hums  
I fall asleep on the floor.



**“I hope you explode into a pile of guts and don’t apologize for making a mess.”**

I hate talking about the seasons  
because I want it to be okay  
that I am always cold. Apparently,  
there is a medicine that will stop  
my toes from turning purple, but will it  
tie my veins back together  
after I shiver so hard I split like firewood?

Probably not. In a linoleum sunroom,  
grey scale blood rests on a hot pink  
desert. I try to watch a Tampa sunrise, but one eye  
is under the table  
and the other is glued to the TV.

## **How to Make the Moon Fall in Love with You**

Cut open a bag of tea.

Spread the leaves over bathroom tile and parking lot black top.

Light candles in old soap dishes

Write messages to Artemis in lemonade and chalk.

Arrange a marriage with the moon for the third Sunday in April.

Make sure to invite your parents.

You are Folly the Hunter.

Eat a peach.

Only wear skirts.

Practice confessing your love for the girl down the street to photographs of Sylvia Plath.

Dry sliced figs on your windowsill.

Never time how long they bake.

The batteries in your watch must always be dead.

Folly, please, do not grow old.

### **Chopin Lives In Our Mouths**

I used to drop pennies in the corner of a room  
for the girl whose boyfriend, a little stoned, got lost

in stringed lights and Oreos filling, forgetting to talk to her.  
She ignored me for two summers, falling for vodka  
blackouts and a poet from Connecticut.

I grew a peachy sadness. Almost bed  
another one. Woke up with an unused condom

in my pocket and my head in a toilet filled with pits.  
In June I came home bitter and fleshy. She called

me with a half finished stanza stuck in her teeth. I washed it out  
with a handle of margarita mix. It read something like Chopin's  
Nocturne in C-Sharp Minor. As we laid in my childhood  
bed, she split my lips apart and pushed a coin purse

into the back of my mouth. She said she could not spend  
the night, but she'd always look fondly at my shine. I cannot play  
the classics anymore. I rattle with change, a broken music box down the hill.

## On A Limb

Every time you take a selfie your eyes  
dim like almost dead flashlights,  
the dull light that keeps me warm  
like seat heaters in a Subaru hatchback.  
There is a comfort to sitting in jazz with you.  
Old with smoke, with semi-dry mead,  
with turtlenecks that say something  
like *I used to be more pretentious*. Like  
love hatching under a light  
in a classroom aquarium. Young like  
it's warm and knows something.  
Our backs pressed into a stranger's  
sofa, my finger in your mouth.

## **And the Mountains were Blue**

Slow moose nibble at pond lilies that float  
in shallow basins collecting  
in the wreckage of Russian planes at the base  
of blue mountains. Loose snow falling onto split upholstery  
and antlers, inching like the moose, up the mountain.  
Thread and steel, the plane – a shit town  
buried in white – cuts  
    a moose  
            lily stuck to his nose  
as he wanders into the blue.